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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, October 5, 2007

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MIRS

October 3, 2007

Chambers Agree To \$433.3 Million In Cuts

Legislative leaders have begun combing through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 budget this week for \$433.3

million in cuts that will include an \$80 million slice in the Department of Human Services (DHS), a \$55.6

million cut in the Department of Corrections (DOC) and a \$52.5 million hit to the Department of

Community Health (DCH).

Most state departments will still be asked to absorb 2.5 percent in across-the-board cuts, a combined

savings of \$24.9 million.

Also, as part of the budget-balancing agreement made between lawmakers and the administration, the

proposed increase in funding for K-12 schools, community colleges and state universities was knocked

from 2.5 to 1 percent, according to a "guiding principle" document the House and Senate appropriations

committees are working from.

All told, the reductions to the suggested increases in education will save the state \$173.4 million in K-12;

\$4.2 million in community colleges; and \$21.5 million in higher education.

However, the K-12 budget will

include \$20 million in equity payment to school districts on the low end of the per-pupil foundation

allowance chart.

The legislative fiscal agencies pegged the FY 2008 budget at \$1.749 billion.

After the pair of tax increases

passed this week, the deficit shrank to \$433.3 million. That still required several cuts, including a 6.4

percent slice in the state's building debt service, 4.8 percent in Justice Training Grant reductions, and \$10

million from the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF).

"These won't be easy cuts," said Senate Appropriations Chair Ron

JELINEK (R-Three Oaks). "We didn't

fund the moon."

While balancing the FY 2008 budget has necessitated an 11 percent income tax hike, an expansion of the use tax to include some services and significant cuts, the budget will also mark the first time in the last six years where one-time sources have not been used to patch together the coming year's budget.

Outside of the \$10 million from the CTF, the '08 budget wasn't patched together by paying later for services needed today or by raiding various pots of money scattered throughout state government.

MORNING SUN

Dancers lead fight for fathers' rights

By SUSAN FIELD
Clare Managing Editor

Dawn Thomas has been fighting a battle on behalf of her son and grandson for two years.

Derek Bailey of Traverse City has been fighting to see his children since a court referee allowed his ex-girlfriend to move with them to Alberta.

Bailey, the founder of Dance4Equality, Thomas and others were across the street from the Isabella County courthouse Tuesday, bringing awareness to their plight.

Members of the group bring the issue to light through traditional Native dance.

Bailey, a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, was living in Mt. Pleasant when his ex-girlfriend moved the children to Canada with the court's permission, according to his aunt, Maren Bailey.

Members of the group use the traditional dances to bring attention to their cause, which asserts that mothers get preference over fathers in too many divorce situations.

What Thomas, the Baileys and others want people to be aware of is the alleged "inequality" in rights between mothers and fathers.

Derek Bailey founded Dance4Equality to promote advocacy for awareness and change.

Thomas said the issue is not just statewide but national.

The system, Thomas said, is biased toward women and is harming children by separating them from their fathers.

Derek Bailey believes that the best way to protect children from the stresses of divorce or separation of parents is to ensure a strong relationship with both parents, when both are fit.

While Thomas said her son filed for custody of his son, the court ruled that he could only have visitation six nights a month, and only if the visits did not interfere with the boy's mother's schedule.

Thomas said the system enables manipulative women to use their children against their fathers.

While Thomas and others put the blame on the friend of the court, that is misdirected, one Isabella County official said.

Greg Fogle, assistant friend of the court, said his department is responsible for enforcing court orders, not to investigate claims of neglect or abuse.

In those cases, Fogle said, the Michigan Department of Human Services investigates and makes recommendations to the court.

Charges of neglect must carry proof for courts to order changes in custody, Fogle said, and courts are leaning toward joint physical custody when possible.

Despite what Maren Bailey and Thomas say, Fogle said there are avenues a father can take when he believes he is not being treated fairly.

"There are procedures to hold custodial parents accountable," Fogle said.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/100507/loc_dancers.shtml

Midland Daily News

Thursday letters to the editor

10/04/2007

Surprising comments

To the editor:

I was surprised by the comments made by Rep. John Moolenaar regarding early childhood education in a recent article, "Area Legislators Restate Commitment to Education as State Budget Deadline Looms." Of course K-12 education is important. But to me, his comments suggest that he is missing the direct link between early childhood and K-12 education.

I believe the representative sees a need to invest in K-12 because there is such a high cost to educate our children. But the reason that it is so costly is because such a large amount of children are arriving to the schoolhouse doors unprepared. Rep. Moolenaar should be supporting an increase in the investment of early childhood programs, as this means supporting a large cost-savings in the K-12 budget as well.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation was created by Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm to address early childhood and pave the way for a strong future workforce.

To date, the ECIC has supported the creation of 21 Great Start Collaboratives(GSC) around the state. The GSC's are working hard to assess the real needs of children in their communities so they can begin to address the issues that are derailing our children from succeeding in school and in life.

It is imperative that budget discussions continue to include the investment of early childhood programs. It is not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

Judy Samelson

Chief Executive Officer

Early Childhood Investment Corp.

Lansing

GHT boy enters plea in sexual assault case

Thu, Oct 4, 2007

BY CHRIS EPPLETT

cepplett@grandhaventribune.com

WEST OLIVE — A 14-year-old Grand Haven Township boy pleaded no contest Wednesday to five felony counts related to the sexual assault of an 18-year-old Grand Haven Township woman on June 2, foregoing a trial schedule to begin next week.



In a deal reached with Judge Mark Feyen in Ottawa County Juvenile Court Wednesday morning, Fathi Cullen is likely to be placed in a residential treatment program in Iowa, followed by probation. His formal sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 18.

According to the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department, Cullen, age 13 at the time, entered an 18-year-old woman's residence on Crooked Tree Lane at Riven Haven Village mobile home park on June 2 and sexually assaulted her. During the five-hour search for Cullen that afternoon, police said he also attempted to sexually assault two other girls, ages 12 and 14, in Hofma Park, west of Forest Park Drive.

The boy faces separate charges in connection to the second incident.

Cullen, the son of Antonio and Saundra Cullen, who lived in the same mobile home park as the victim at the time of the incident, was designated as

an adult and faced possible adult sentencing or delayed sentencing. He instead chose to plead no contest to charges of attempted first-degree criminal sexual conduct, two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, first-degree home invasion and interfering with electronic communications.

In addition to sentencing imposed by the judge, Cullen will be placed on the sex offender's registry. Since he is 14 years old, Cullen will appear only on a private sex offenders list available only to law enforcement and court officials. Once he turns 17, he will be entered on the public list, and remain on the registry for 25 years.

"I'm glad he's entered a plea for the victim's sake," said Assistant Prosecutor Jennifer Kuiper, adding that testifying at a trial would have been difficult for the victim. "She's gone through a lot."

Kuiper confirmed the woman will make a statement at Cullen's sentencing.

According to Ottawa County casework services manager Paul Lindemuth, Cullen will likely be sent to Woodward Academy, located 30 miles northwest of Des Moines, Iowa, for residential treatment. Lindemuth said Ottawa County frequently uses Woodward's program.

Most youth spend about one year in the program, but Cullen's stay will depend on his progress and treatment plan, Lindemuth said.

Cullen's attorney, Leonard Mungo, said the boy's parents were content with the agreement. He also said the case highlights the state's lack of help for foster children like Fathi.

"If there's any statement this case can make to the world, it's how the state has invested too late and too little to the children's needs," Mungo said. "Fathi is going to get the treatment he needs, but much later than he needed it. It's an issue that's larger than Fathi or the woman he injured."

Meanwhile, Kuiper declined to comment on the terms of Wednesday's deal between Mungo and Judge Feyen.

"They're serious charges," Kuiper said. "They'll be on (Cullen's) record forever."



Thursday, October 04, 2007

Local woman cleared of domestic assaults

Luke Stier
Staff Writer

Thursday, October 04, 2007

STANTON - A Greenville woman accused of slapping her teenage daughter and dragging another teen across the kitchen by her hair was found not guilty of assault charges Wednesday.

Yvonne Faye Bunce, 43, was on trial before Judge David Hoort in 8th Judicial Circuit Court, charged with two counts of domestic assault. After a 1-hour trial, a jury of seven men and five women deliberated for nearly an hour before coming back with two not guilty verdicts.

Bunce's attorney, Tom Ginster of Greenville, declined to comment on the case after the verdict was announced.

"I'm disappointed with the verdict," said Montcalm County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Douglas McFadden. "But the jury did their job. They pondered all the evidence."

The charges stemmed from a July 1 incident that took place at Bunce's residence and began when her 15-year-old daughter, Nicole, and two 19-year-old friends, Heath Ann Simmons, 19, and Lisa Ann Wotring, 19, both of Greenville, went camping on Lincoln Lake.

Everyone agreed that the three were given permission to go camping but that no boys were to be allowed at the campout. Bunce testified that when she called her daughter at about 10:30 p.m. she heard boys in the background. It was at this point that she asked her daughter to come home.

The three girls testified that two boys had stopped by to show them a car. They said they did not use any alcohol or illegal drugs that night.

The three returned to Bunce's home at about 11 p.m. The daughter testified that sometime during the next 10 to 15 minutes she was smacked across the face by her mother. Simmons and Wotring testified that they were in the basement and heard the incident.

A friend of Bunce's, Shelby Jean Sunderlin, 48, of Lakeview said she was in the living room with Bunce and her daughter but did not see or hear any physical contact.

Simmons and Wotring testified that after hearing the slap they called Bunce's son, Michael William Bunce, 20, who lived just blocks away. He testified that after he arrived he witnessed Bunce pulling Wotring backward by her hair.

Yvonne Bunce, who admitted having "at least six or seven beers" that night, denied that both incidents occurred.

Ginster told the jury that the victims' stories were "too consistent."

"They all come in here like drones and give their speeches," he said. "They were locked into this story on that night and they have had to stick with it. That is why we are here now."

"Without evidence, no photographs, no central dispatch tape, no videos... that's lack of evidence," Ginster said. "That's reasonable doubt."

McFadden outlined the incident during his closing statement.

"What really happened that night?" he said. "Yvonne Bunce got drunk. She made a phone call and a snap judgment. Nicole went home, probably knowing what she would face when she got home, and boy did she face it, all for a disobedience that didn't occur."

"Yvonne says it didn't turn physical but all these people testified differently," McFadden said. "Can everybody be wrong except her? I don't think so."

Since a conviction would have qualified Yvonne Bunce as a habitual offender, the charges against her were felonies carrying penalties of up to three years in prison.



Lengthy prison term coming

Friday, October 05, 2007

A man pleads to a lesser charge in the fatal shooting of his estranged wife before dozens of witnesses.

LaNIA COLEMAN

THE SAGINAW NEWS

MOUNT PLEASANT -- An Ewart man, charged in the Jan. 9 shooting death of his estranged wife as she hung upside down from her seat belt in her overturned vehicle outside the newspaper where she worked, has avoided trial by pleading no contest to a lesser charge.

Isabella County Trial Judge William R. Rush will sentence Thomas D. Babb at 9:15 a.m. Monday, Oct. 29.

As part of the plea agreement, Babb must serve a minimum prison sentence of 37 to 56 years for slaying Mary L. Babb, said Prosecutor Larry J. Burdick.

Babb, 37, did not contest a second-degree murder charge, nor did he contest charges of aggravated stalking, assault with a dangerous weapon and felony firearm possession.

A no-contest plea means Babb, a habitual offender, accepts punishment but does not admit guilt. In exchange for the pleas, Burdick agreed to drop a felony murder charge, which carries a mandatory life sentence.

"Witnesses indicated that on Jan. 9, Babb was seen outside the (Mount Pleasant) Morning Sun (newspaper) building, where his estranged wife worked," Burdick said. "When she left work at the end of the day, he drove over to the parking lot, blocking her vehicle's path.

"When she attempted to escape by driving her car in reverse, his vehicle struck hers, causing it to overturn. Witnesses then said he exited his truck, walked over to her vehicle with a shotgun and fired twice, killing her."

Mary Babb, the 30-year-old mother of a 4-year-old son, suffered two shots to the chest from a 20-gauge shotgun, Saginaw News records show. The slaying occurred in the parking lot of the newspaper where she worked as an advertising representative.

A statewide manhunt for Thomas Babb ended after two hours when Osceola County sheriff's deputies arrested him in Ewart, about 45 miles northwest of Mount Pleasant, where he had worked as a subcontractor installing tiles in houses.

During an April 12 preliminary hearing, his brother, Joseph Babb, testified that Thomas Babb confessed to the murder.

Witnesses also testified that Babb told them he wanted to kill his wife because he was distraught over their breakup.

Mary Babb had obtained a personal protection order against him.v

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Victim or killer? Group says woman was abused; prosecutor says she plotted husband's death

Friday, October 05, 2007

By John Agar

Gazette News Service

ALLEGAN -- One version of her story reads like a nightmare: Abused by her husband, she was sentenced to life in prison after a friend, trying to protect her, shot and killed her drug-addicted husband.

Kimberly Lundgren's story was compelling enough for the Michigan Women's Justice & Clemency Project to feature her on the cover of its brochure, as well as a flier announcing a noon rally for its cause today on the Capitol building steps in Lansing.

But there is another version of the story, say local authorities who investigated the 1993 death of Lundgren's husband, James Lundgren, who was killed while he slept in their Fillmore Township home, just south of Holland.

They say Kim Lundgren wanted to start a new life with her then-19-year-old boyfriend, Dennis Leonard, who fired the fatal shots. Even more disturbing, those plans included killing her children, ages 1 and 3, according to statements both gave police.

There certainly are cases of battered women unfairly prosecuted, but Margaret Zuzich-Bakker, an assistant Allegan County prosecutor, said: "This case is not one of those."

The Clemency Project, which boasts endorsements by former Gov. William Milliken, the American Civil Liberties Union and women's advocacy groups, worked unsuccessfully to free Lundgren after she was sentenced to life in prison. She died on Sept. 2, 2006, at age 46.

"People just do not understand what women like her went through, and how desperate she became," said Carol Jacobsen, a Clemency Project coordinator and University of Michigan professor.

But Zuzich-Bakker said Lundgren has no place among women who kill their way out of dangerous, abusive relationships. She said the clemency group did not contact the prosecutor's office or properly research Lundgren's case.

For instance, the project claimed that "no issues of abuse were raised at her trial." Lundgren didn't have a trial. She pleaded no contest to second-degree murder.

Zuzich-Bakker is a founding board member of Sylvia's Place, a shelter for battered women. In her 24 years as a prosecutor, she has focused on domestic violence, and worked with county and state groups to combat domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

She is convinced "Kimberly Lundgren was a manipulative woman who seduced a young man with the intent to use him in a scheme to kill her husband."

James Lundgren suffered five gunshot wounds, three to his head, while sleeping on July 30, 1993. His wife called 911 and reported two people broke into their home, shot her husband and beat and sexually assaulted her. Their younger child was in bed with the couple and had blood splatters on her.

Hours after the killing, police heard Lundgren had talked about killing her husband. Leonard confessed. Lundgren did, too.

Leonard, who also pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, was sentenced to 25 to 50 years in prison. ``I work with Dennis, and I'm also in love with him," Lundgren told sheriff's detectives Chris Koster and Lon Hoyer, according to police reports obtained by The Press.

Of her husband, she said, ``At that time, basically, he was being a typical slob, being an alcoholic, smoking all the time."

Later, she said he would ``Pull my hair, hit me in the chest, hit me in the abdomen. He used to try to hit me where it wouldn't show."

Jacobsen, the Clemency Project coordinator, said she talked at length with Lundgren and her family, and believed her story of abuse. She said Lundgren didn't pull the trigger, but fell victim to ``overzealous" prosecution.

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Domestic violence candlelight vigil takes place in Mason Twp.

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News
Friday, October 5, 2007 10:27 AM EDT

EDWARDSBURG - Commentators such as Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly and "quick sound bites" are "continuing the tradition of coming up with a simplistic response to the very complex issue of domestic violence," the keynote speaker of the annual Cass County Candlelight Vigil observed Thursday night.

Speaking to the theme "I'm the Victim - Not the Blame" as candles flickered like fireflies dancing across the broad lawn beside Mason Township Hall on U.S. 12, Pat Hillmann said, "Whenever any of us hears of a heinous event, it is all too common to try to find something the victim did wrong. We do this to lessen our sense of anguish over the victim's suffering and to distance ourselves from the possibility that this could happen to us or to somebody we care about."

"In Bill O'Reilly's case," she said, "add the factor of making controversial remarks to boost viewership."

"Many people, including those who regularly work with survivors in the criminal justice and child welfare systems, do not pay sufficient attention to the impact of the abuser's use of power and control," Hillmann said. "This very clearly muddies the water of assigning victim responsibility for not getting out or for not testifying against the person who is terrorizing them. Fully appreciating the use of this power-and-control dynamic and the effect it has on victims and their children clearly shifts the focus from individual victim responsibility to community responsibility for ending the violence."

"If it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to stop domestic violence," Hillmann said. "When we truly understand how domestic violence works, it is clear an intervention is needed from outside the family system to hold the abuser criminally and morally accountable for his actions. We need to make it clear to batterers that violence and threats of violence are illegal actions with criminal consequences that are, in fact, imposed and denounced as morally unacceptable by our churches and by our communities. Mental health professionals have a special responsibility not to imply that survivors share blame for their own abuse because of their psychological issues."

Ironically, Hillmann and O'Reilly, 58, hail from the same town on Long Island, Levittown, N.Y.

"Most people shy away from the word 'victim' since it implies helplessness and lack of responsibility for changing things," said Hillmann, who directed Domestic and Sexual Assault Services for 16 years.

Last month DASAS named the shelter in Three Rivers for her.

"However, it is an appropriate word to use when differentiating as to who carries the responsibility for violence in an intimate partner relationship," she said.

O'Reilly "describes these men as troubled, chaotic and irresponsible," Hillmann said, "while insisting he is not victim-blaming. He clearly holds Jessie Davis and Nancy Benoit responsible for the murders of Jessie's 9-month-old fetus and Nancy's 7-year-old son, Daniel. He states, and I quote, 'Those ladies made big mistakes. By allowing the chaos they allowed, they did not protect their children.' O'Reilly never mentions the responsibility of the men who committed these murders.

"I challenge each of us here tonight - and everyone working for justice in Cass County - to carefully and honestly assess where we are in holding batterers accountable to our community," Hillmann said. "We must listen to victims and commit the resources necessary to do the job. We must look for innovative and creative approaches, and if what we're doing is not working, we need to find new approaches that will work."

"Victims of domestic violence do make bad decisions," she acknowledged, "just as every one of us - domestic violence victim or not - has made bad decisions. Many of them repeated, over and over. Telling them to just get out is a quick sound bite, but does not acknowledge the reality of further retaliation from the abuser or recognize survivor strengths in protecting their children and is plain not respectful.

"We need to help victims sort things out without imposing our judgments and work to change the culture that supports and glorifies chaotic and irresponsible abusers."

Angela, a survivor, traced her story back to her high school sweetheart.

"He didn't turn out to be so sweet," she said. "He used both physical and emotional abuse. It began early. He's what we now call a classical batterer. He was very controlling and demeaning, and nothing I did was ever good enough for him. I thought if we married, he'd see how much I cared."

After 11 years and three children, Angela said, "I finally fled that horror into the arms of my next abuser. He took me and my children in and under his control. This began a long pattern of abusive relationships."

Alcohol "became my companion," she said, sniffing. "It kept me both numb and functioning. It wasn't until I was stricken with a paralyzing disease that I was able to change my addictive behavior. I was sober and relationship-free for about two years when I met my next partner. I really thought I had found the man of my dreams, only to find the nightmare begin all over again," Angela said. "Although there was no physical assault, the emotional and verbal attacks left me mentally bruised."

At that point Angela found DASAS and learned about domestic violence.

"Even though I thought I was the reason and the blame, I learned that it's about power and control and if that person tried to abuse, nothing I did caused it. The education that I now have helped me to grow as a person. I am now a strong, independent woman, and a volunteer for Domestic and Sexual Abuse Services. I can now help others not only recognize the warning signs of an abuser. No abuse is acceptable. This will help prevent another name from being added to the list," which Master of Ceremonies Greg Price acknowledged gets longer every year and seems to go "on and on and on."

DASAS Executive Director Mary Lynn Falbe welcomed the more than 40 people who attended, including state Rep. Rick Shaffer, R-Three Rivers, Sheriff Joe Underwood, Dowagiac Police Chief Tom Atkinson and County Commissioners Ed Goodman, D-Silver Creek Township, Gordon Bickel Sr., R-Porter Township, Charlie Arnold, R-Cassopolis, and Ann File, R-Cassopolis.

Reflecting on Katie Purlee singing "Wind Beneath My Wings" to open the program, Shaffer said, "How do we ever break the cycle? I think part of breaking that cycle is the courage Katie exhibited coming up here. And Angela, volunteers make the world go 'round, but this sort of volunteering takes one who has been through the abuse cycle. I applaud you for all you do and those within our shelter. It takes all of us working together to be able to end this kind of cycle someday. Keep the courage."

Sheriff Underwood, referring to the commissioners attending, said, "This is what this is all about - heightening awareness. Bringing more and more people together, like we are tonight, to talk about it and spread the word that domestic violence in Cass County is not going to be tolerated. From the law enforcement end, whether it's Cassopolis police, Dowagiac police, Edwardsburg police, Michigan State Police of Niles or White Pigeon or the Sheriff's Office, we're of one accord on how we're going to address domestic violence in Cass County: It's not acceptable behavior and there are consequences. The Prosecutor's Office takes it very seriously when we get a case of domestic violence. The only way we can continue to protect the victims is to let them know it's okay to tell someone. It's okay to seek help when you have a problem in this area. You've got support. It's not something we keep behind closed doors. We've got to continue to heighten awareness."

Price, of New Hope Day Reporting Center and chairman of the Cass County Task Force for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, shared that he lost an aunt in Chicago "to years and years of physical abuse. This brings it close to home to me. She was a good lady and didn't deserve what she got. Why she didn't leave, I don't know."

Chaplain Carl Ross of the Cass County Sheriff's Office and Forgotten Man Ministries gave an invocation and closing prayer.



— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

LACASA staffers in Belize to aid social service agencies

Efforts to focus on domestic violence, sexual assault

Friday, October 05, 2007

BY TOM TOLEN

News Staff Reporter

Three Livingston County women are in Belize until Oct. 15 to work with community leaders and social service agencies in the tiny Central American country on domestic violence and sexual assault issues.

Candy Jones-Guerin, Jessica Kelley and Jan Watkins - all employees of LACASA, a local domestic violence and sexual assault treatment and prevention agency - left last weekend for the former British colony, about the size of Massachusetts, in the Caribbean.

While there, the local women will be staying in Belizean homes in small villages and will be driven to the nation's largest city, Belize City, each day to conduct the seminars and workshops.

"I've been looking forward to it," said Watkins, a 27-year veteran of LACASA and statewide program director for the Michigan-Belize project.

"We have several workshops with groups like the YWCA for women who have been identified as 'at risk,'" Jones-Guerin said. "We will visit the Hattieville Prison and do a four-day, intensive workshop for community leaders and we will help them create strategic planning," she said.

The Belize trip is part of a two-week educational exchange that was arranged by Partners of the Americas and funded by the State Department. Michigan has had an ongoing partnership with Belize since 1966, and has helped the country in areas such as agriculture, health and education.

The trip is similar to a visit arranged four years ago through Partners of the Americas, in which social workers from the Dominican Republic came to LACASA headquarters in Howell to get first-hand knowledge about its programs and services.

Partners of the Americas is an international, volunteer-based organization dedicated to helping Latin American nations by sharing technical assistance and sharing experiences.

"Where they are is where we were seven years ago," Jones-Guerin said. "You must remember that domestic violence programs and shelters are only 25 years old in the U.S."

While in Belize, the women were scheduled to visit Haven House, the country's first shelter for victims of domestic assault, to conduct programs and seminars. They were also to be interviewed and featured in local newspapers and on radio and TV.

Watkins and Jones-Guerin said they realize there are cultural differences between the two countries, but still feel they will be able to accomplish much.

"We try to be culturally sensitive, to not force the American mentality but (to do) things that will work for them," Jones-Guerin said. Too, there is a common language: English is the official language of Belize, although Mayan and Creole dialects are spoken there.

Watkins said that domestic violence and sexual assault aren't necessarily worse in Belize than in other countries, though the women have to deal with the Latin American culture of machismo.

"It's a worldwide problem," Watkins said. "(Domestic violence or sexual assault) is one of the top three

things women have to deal with," she says, citing health care and education as the others.

One problem in Belize, Jones-Guerin said, is that a greater number of such crimes go unreported because health care and emergency service workers are not trained to spot domestic violence or sexual assault.

The Livingston women hope to change that, and to teach residents in Belize how to build a strong support network.

Tom Tolen can be reached at ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2009.

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Clinics to swallow bitter budget pill?

Thursday, October 04, 2007

By Ken Kolker

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Jawaan Gill is far more concerned about her daughter's body temperature -- over 100 on Wednesday -- than in the fever pitch of Lansing budget cuts.

But one of those potential cuts, to Medicaid, could make care more difficult to get at clinics such as Cherry Street Health Services, where her 4-year-old daughter, DeontiAsia, was treated for a fever and her 1-year-old son, Romeco, got a checkup.

Cuts to state-funded insurance for the poor could lead to longer waits to see the doctor, longer waits to get a cavity filled or to get new glasses, the clinic director said.

"I'm trying to get off Medicaid," said Gill, 22, of Grand Rapids, a mother of three who works part-time at a gas station and has no medical benefits. "But, until then, this is something my kids need to stay healthy."

While big hospitals such as Spectrum Health, Saint Mary's Health Care and Metro Health say Medicaid cuts could lead to hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential losses, clinics for the poor could feel it the most.

Hospital officials said they also worry the state could cut or reduce the kinds of treatment Medicaid will pay for, such as physical therapy.

Half of the nonprofit Cherry Street Health Services' 42,000 patients -- low-income children and families -- are supported by Medicaid, said program Executive Director Chris Shea.

"Certainly, any cuts in Medicaid are critical to us," Shea said. "Any cuts would mean we would have to hold the line on expansion, perhaps."

The center has added a clinic every year or two since opening in 1988 and now has 11 around Grand Rapids. It needs more, Shea said.

Recent U.S. Census figures show the ranks of low-income in Kent County grew by 16,000 people since 2000.

"It shows the need, that more people are out there," Shea said. "We don't have the capacity to serve them all."

Already, the center turns away patients who need non-emergency dental care.

The clinic at 550 Cherry St. SE was crowded Wednesday, but it was typical -- the 11 doctors see as many as 200 patients a day.

Meanwhile, the news from Lansing keeps changing, from a possible 1.1 percent Medicaid cut to no cuts at all.

"Until the process is done, it's impossible to say that anything is off the table," Office of the State Budget spokeswoman Leslee Fritz said Wednesday.

Lawmakers have until the end of October to decide on \$440 million in cuts.

"The governor has made it very clear she doesn't want to kick people off health care," Fritz said. "But it would be fair to say they are looking at other ways to reduce the cost of the community health budget. That could mean cuts in other areas of Medicaid."

Spectrum Health already loses about \$46 million a year because Medicaid does not cover the cost of care, said Chief Financial Officer Michael Freed.

On average, Medicaid covers about 17 percent of patients in the hospitals, though it is closer to 45 percent at DeVos Children's Hospital, he said.

"Any cut, in addition to what we're already experiencing, would just exacerbate the problem," he said.

Send e-mail to the author: kkolker@grpress.com

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(Photo by KEVIN W. FOWLER/For the Lansing State Journal)

Protesting: Helene Ellis (left) and her husband Joel are among those present during a protest against President Bush's veto of the SCHIP program on Thursday in front of Rep. Mike Rogers' office in Lansing.

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Dozens protest SCHIP veto in Lansing: Rogers urged to vote to override Bush on insurance

Derek Wallbank and Mara Lee
Lansing State Journal

More than 60 protesters today stood outside U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers' Lansing office holding signs imploring him to reverse course and vote to override a presidential veto on a bill to extend the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

The program provides health insurance coverage for about 6.6 million children across the country. SCHIP expired Sept. 30, though it is being continued through emergency funding.

Rogers voted against the program expansion, although he said in an interview in Washington, D.C. on Thursday that he favors improved guidelines for the program and believes it will pass once both parties work out the details.

The federal funding supports Michigan's MICHILD and Healthy Kids, which provides health care coverage for 55,000 children and 60,000 adults.

"This really gets me upset," said Keith McCall, 87, of East Lansing, who stood alongside Michigan Avenue waving a sign. "This was a stupid vote. Both Bush and Rogers, they don't know what they're doing," he said.

Similar protests took place Thursday across the country, organized by left-leaning activist groups such as MoveOn.org.

Rogers brushed aside the criticism, saying that when liberal groups say Republicans don't want to help poor children get health insurance, "that's wrong, and it's not true."

Rogers said he couldn't support the bill because he doesn't adequately push states to find low-income children who aren't enrolled before they expand income limits to cover kids without insurance in middle-class families. He also thinks the rules on how states verify citizenship of the children applying to get help need to be clarified.

In August, when he voted against a more expensive House version, he said he would vote for the smaller Senate version, but decided not to the next month.

Three Michigan Republicans did vote for this version.

Rogers said the fact that the House and Senate versions were not reconciled through a bipartisan conference committee set up this confrontation.

Although a majority of House members voted to expand State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by \$7 billion a year, it's not a large enough majority to override the president's veto. Bush vetoed the additional spending Wednesday.

"I don't think we're as far apart as we think they are," Rogers said Thursday. He predicts a second vote in the House to override the veto will fail. Then, he expects Congressional leaders to negotiate changes to the bill to either get enough House Republicans to override the veto, or to convince the president to sign it.

Rogers said an almost-unanimous vote for passage can be worked out "when they're done with their political theater."

State Journal correspondent Mara Lee contributed to this report. Contact Derek Wallbank at 267-1301 or dwallbank@lsj.com.

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Article published Oct 5, 2007

Walberg urged to back health-care override

Elizabeth Huff

The Enquirer

Some local leaders Thursday called on U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg to vote to overturn a presidential veto.

The veto is meant to stop Congress from doubling the money given to children's health insurance programs, including MICHild, Healthy Kids and the Adult Benefits Waiver in Michigan.

Walberg, R-Tipton, already has voted once against the \$35 billion expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), instead siding with President Bush's \$5 billion expansion.

Without alteration to the bill, he plans again to vote against the larger expansion on Oct. 18, said Matt Lahr, Walberg's spokesman.

Three local leaders spoke publicly Thursday, calling on Walberg to change his vote to allow SCHIP — which covers children whose parents can't afford private health insurance and don't already qualify for Medicaid — to vote for the \$35 billion expansion.

"The truth is that working families cannot afford private insurance," said Democrat Kate Segal, county commission chairwoman.

Marvin Austin, former Democratic county commissioner, said he left politics because he hated to see a community hurt by partisan decisions.

"Smaller government doesn't help a child when he or she needs dental care," he said.

The gathering was organized by Kalamazoo-based Michigan Citizen Action, an affiliate of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit USAction, which is encouraging four Michigan Republican representatives to vote against Bush's override.

Five voted against the \$35 billion expansion, but Michigan Citizen Action is not pressuring on Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland, because they feel he is "immovable," a spokeswoman said.

The House and Senate each need a two-thirds majority to overturn the president's veto. While there appear to be enough votes in the Senate, analysts say about 15 more votes are needed in the House.

In Michigan, three programs utilize SCHIP dollars. MICHild and Healthy Kids provide comprehensive health insurance coverage to children who live at less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or less than \$35,000 for a family of three.

The Adult Benefits Waiver provides prescription and outpatient coverage for adults who don't qualify for Medicaid and make less than \$3,500, utilizing unused SCHIP dollars in Michigan.

Elizabeth Huff can be reached at 966-0684 or ehuff@battlecr.gannett.com.



Ad targets Walberg

Thursday, October 04, 2007

A multimedia ad campaign run by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is taking shots at Rep. Tim Walberg, R--Tipton, for voting against a children's health-care program.

Though the bill, known as the State Children's Health Insurance Plan, or SCHIP, passed the House, President Bush vetoed it Wednesday.

"Congressman Walberg has a simple choice: Give 10 million children the health care they need or turn his back on those children," says the ad. "Call Congressman Walberg and tell him to stand with the kids, not George Bush."

Walberg spokesman Matt Lahr said the congressman supports SCHIP in its original intentions but voted against the current bill because it extended the program too far -- to illegal immigrants, adults up to age 25 and families who already have private health insurance.

The ad runs on local radio stations, via robocalls and over e-mail. The campaign hopes to convince 15 House Republicans to change their votes so SCHIP supporters can override Bush's veto.

-- Christina Hildreth

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Energy assistance available

Published Thursday, October 4, 2007 4:00:14 PM Central Time

By ERIC HJERSTEDT SHARP

Ironwood Daily Globe Staff Writer

Area residents in both Michigan and Wisconsin can apply for energy assistance, although procedures in both states vary as to eligibility and amounts allotted.

The surge in energy costs -- fueled largely by the booming prices in crude oil -- continues to hurt people in their pocketbooks. Seniors and others living on fixed incomes, as well as the working poor, have been hit the hardest.

Additional federal funding

Michigan is receiving \$5.8 million in additional federal funding for the Low Income Heating Assistance Program, U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, said.

"Paying heating bills can be a major challenge for seniors and people on fixed incomes," Stupak said. "This funding will allow the state to help more northern Michigan seniors and families who struggle to pay their heating bills. By providing this money now, we can help the State of Michigan plan ahead for the winter months."

LIHEAP funding is made available to the states, which administer the funding. Each year Congress appropriates LIHEAP contingency funds the President may use to address energy emergencies.

Earlier this month, Stupak joined with colleagues in Congress to call on the administration to release additional LIHEAP contingency funding.

"I am pleased that the administration listened to those of us in Congress and saw fit to release this funding," Stupak said. "Congress has approved more than \$151 million for LIHEAP, and I am pleased that the President saw fit to release that money and help millions of Americans that are struggling with their energy bills."

"No family should be forced to choose between paying an energy bill and putting food on the table," Stupak said. "No senior citizen should have to decide between buying life-saving

prescriptions and paying utility bills."

Michigan network helps out

In Michigan, a network of government and nonprofit agencies work together to help assure energy consumers are not shut off. With dwindling state and federal funds, however, officials are generally in agreement that the system is not without its faults.

In fact, the state ran out of fuel assistance funding for the last two months of the fiscal year (August and September), according to Fred Lahtinen, a family independence manager with the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The Department of Human Services and the Gogebic-Ontonagon Community Action Agency work in tandem to help people with their energy bills. The Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul also reach out to needy families and provide funds to people who have exhausted other avenues.

Community Action Agency Director Carolynn Carlson said funds for energy assistance have not yet come into her office. The place to start, however, is with the Human Services Department, she added.

"The funds usually come in around January," Carlson said. "People should check with us every month, however."

There are a number of things people can do to avoid running out of money for energy and utility bills. In fact, the agency is trying to promote "client education," has a weatherization program and will be starting up later this year with another series of energy classes at senior centers and schools.

"People need to continue to pay on their bills to qualify for assistance, even if it's just a portion," Carlson said. "That's part of the criteria."

In general, income guidelines for eligibility to the program are at 100 percent of the federal poverty level for the Department of Human Services and 200 percent for Community Action Agency applicants. There are also "energy caps" of \$550 for heating fuel and \$350 for electricity on human services department claims.

People who wish to apply for energy assistance should use the department's walk-in hours from 7:30 to 10 a.m. on weekdays, except Wednesdays.

Carlson said applicants should only go to the Salvation Army or St. Vincent de Paul after they have applied with Human Services.

Wisconsin residents should start applying

The Iron County Department of Human Services will begin taking applications for the 2007-08 Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program on Monday. According to county officials at the courthouse in Hurley, applications will be taken this year by appointment only. Appointments can be scheduled by calling 561-3636.

Heating applicants are required to bring in the household's yearly heating bills from Sept. 1, 2006, to Aug. 31 (or have the fuel supplier provide print out), the household's electric bills from the above date, Social Security cards for all members of the household and proof of income for the previous three months prior to application for all members of the household who receive income.

"If this information is not provided, the application cannot be completed and will delay any potential payment," an official with the department said.

Income limits for eligibility (based on the three previous months prior to the date of application) range from a \$15,315 annual income (\$3,828.75 for three months) for a household of one; to a \$30,975 annual income (\$7,743.75 for three months) for a family of four.

For each additional person, add \$5,220 annually or \$1,305 for three months.

Walk-in applications will be accepted at the following sites:

- Hurley Senior Center, Oct. 22, 10 a.m to 12:30 p.m.
- Saxon Community Building, Oct. 25, 10:30 a.m. to noon.
- Mercer Town Hall, Oct. 30, 8:30-10:30 a.m.
- Mercer Senior Center, Oct. 30, 11 a.m. to noon.
- Springstead Town Hall, Oct. 30, 1:30-2 p.m.
- Iron Belt Senior Center, Nov. 7, 10:30-noon.
- Hurley Senior Center, Nov. 12, 10:30-noon.
- Mercer Town Hall, Nov. 20, 9:30-11 a.m.
- Mercer Senior Center, Nov. 20, 11:15-11:45 a.m.

Homebound applicants wishing a representative to take an application in their homes should contact Diane at 561-3636. In case of emergency situations where the household may be out of fuel or heat by the next day, people should call the Iron County Human Services Department or, after hours, the sheriff's department at 561-3800.

New hope for jobs? Joblessness remains high at 7.6 percent

By James Martinez, Staff
 Writer

OTSEGO COUNTY — While last week brought news of potential redevelopment of the Georgia-Pacific (G-P) plant and 165 much-needed manufacturing jobs, the county remained in the bottom third of Michigan counties in unemployment for August.

Otsego County ranked 57 out of 83 counties with an August rate of 7.6 percent unemployment, according to data from the Dept. of Labor and Economic Growth ([DLEG](#)).

"There are unemployed people out there of various types of skilled backgrounds. There is an available workforce as we get new companies moving in, hopefully they will be absorbed into new jobs," said Otsego County Economic Alliance (OCEA) Executive Director Jeff Ratcliffe.

Despite those unemployment numbers, the region's economic outlook could change following the announcement of redevelopment for the G-P plant site. The proposed development plans include cellulosic ethanol, an advanced sawmill and wood pellet operations.

According to an OCEA press release, the projects, which are expected to include more than \$170 million in investments, could produce 165 new manufacturing jobs. The projects also could create an additional 350 to 500 producer and transportation jobs, as well as 200 jobs related to construction and renovation of facilities and infrastructure, stated the release.

"If this pans out, it could really help the area get back to where it was a few years ago. With the (additional jobs in producing, transportation and construction) it's really hard to tell (the impact) until the numbers are in," said DLEG Economic Analyst Jim Rhein. "The area really did have a hike up in the rates and we saw the fallout from some previous (closures). This could bring it back to where it was and maybe create even more jobs in the future."

Things are expected to get worse in the near future, though, as unemployment numbers for the area typically start to increase as the summer tourism season concludes with those jobless rates often reaching near 10 percent in January, Rhein said.

According to the DLEG, unemployment rates for Northeast Lower Michigan were at 7.6 percent for August, a drop from July's 8.4 percent. This August's rate, however, is 4 tenths of a percent higher than August 2006, which had a rate of 7.2 percent.

Northeast Lower Michigan, which includes Otsego County, is one of 17 major labor market areas in the state (see chart).

Statewide, seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates declined for August in all of Michigan's 17 major labor market areas with decreases of .5 percent to 1.8 percent.

"Jobless rates typically fall in August throughout Michigan," said Rick Wacławek, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information & Strategic Initiatives. "Unemployment was lowered due to recalls in auto-related manufacturing with the end of the seasonal July shutdown period. The size of the work force in most regions of the state was reduced as summer and seasonal employment opportunities began to wind down in August."

Joblessness may rise to 10%



From August 2006 to August 2007, seasonally unadjusted payroll jobs fell statewide by 65,000 or 1.5 percent. Over the year, manufacturing, government, construction and retail trade employment were down in most metropolitan areas, while jobs in health services were up in nearly all regions.

Nationally, the unadjusted unemployment rate for August was 4.6 percent, according to the U.S. Dept. of Labor.

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